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SUBJECT: GAMBARI TELLS INDIA TO USE ITS INFLUENCE ON BURMA

REF: NEW DELHI 315

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. UN Special Envoy for Burma Ibrahim Gambari's late January visit to India delivered the message that India should use its influence to do more to help the democratization and reconciliation process in Burma. Gambari told British and Canadian missions privately that India reiterated its support for the good offices of the UN mission, and mentioned publicly that he believed India will facilitate his next visit to Burma. Indian media speculated that the GOI is feeling pressure to do more than simply offer verbal support to the UN mission. End Summary.

Message to India: You Can Do More

¶2. (C) UN Special Envoy for Burma Ibrahim Gambari visited India January 29-31 on a mission which included meetings with Vice-President Ansari, Foreign Minister Mukherjee, and Foreign Secretary Menon. Gambari's main message, as reported to Post by the UN Mission and the British High Commission in New Delhi, as well as in Indian media, was that India could do more to help progress on democratization and reconciliation in Burma.

¶3. (C) Gambari publicly called for India to use the influence it claims with the junta -- influence which GOI contacts frequently tell Post stems from its engagement with the GOB (reftel and previous) -- to help bring about tangible progress to the democratization and reconciliation process. He also described a second goal of getting India to serve as a conduit for messages to and from the GOB. Playing to India's staunch opposition to sanctions on Burma, Gambari suggested that if Indian and other interventions fail to deliver results, it would strengthen the arguments of those who believe "the best way is sticks and more sticks." While urging India to do more on Burma, Gambari adeptly addressed India's strong independent streak, noting that the UN was not attempting to dictate conditions for the bilateral India-Burma relationship, merely that it was "up to India to decide" how to use its influence.

Message to Diplomats: India Can Do More

14. (C) Gambari also met privately with Deputy High Commissioners of the British and Canadian High Commissions on January 31. According to UK High Commission Poloff, who attended the meeting, Gambari said that he believes that India has more influence with the Burmese junta than it admits. Gambari noted that Indian officials had reiterated India's support for the good offices of the UN Mission, and suggested they would will press the junta for visas and access. Gambari told the British and Canadian diplomats that he was struck by the surprising importance that India attaches to the UN Group of Friends. The diplomats relayed that Gambari stressed to the Indians was that he is anxious to "stop talking about talks" and begin substantive meetings with the Burmese junta.

Comment: India Can Do More

15. (C) As described in reftel, New Delhi believes its special interests in Burma rationalize a continued business-as-usual approach to the junta during these difficult times. Although MEA issued no public statement on the visit, and unnamed sources within the ministry only confirmed to the press the vague support for the UN mission as in reftel, Gambari told British contacts that he believed India's position had shifted positively during his visit and that he "could live with" the level of support India had offered him. The Times of India summarized the visit by saying "Clearly, it's not enough any more to offer verbal support to the UN's work." Gambari's private comments suggest he believes India is now willing to more actively use its influence in Rangoon and Nyay Pyi Daw.

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